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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS

HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE

1992–93 BIENNIUM

MAY 1991

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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS
HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE 1992-93 BIENNIUM

Prepared by
MDOH
Program Development Division

May 1991

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Cover: Aerial view of Avon - Elliston project on U.S. 12. This project replaced the last pre-WWII section of U.S. 12/287 between Garrison and Three Forks.

INTRODUCTION

The next biennium holds many uncertainties, but it also holds the prospect of new opportunities for the department. Uncertainty regarding the future of the Federal Highway Program and the state-funded Construction Program may unavoidably affect future plans. On the other hand, we view the creation of the new DOT as an opportunity to make the best use of limited resources and improve coordination and delivery of transportation services to the state. The department has already solved many organizational and logistical problems in order to facilitate the conversion into the new DOT.

This report acknowledges future funding uncertainties and attempts to define in simple terms what we see as the highlights of the highway program over the 1992-93 biennium.

SUCCESSFUL FUNDING STRATEGIES

Through intensive program management, the department has been able to successfully capture federal construction dollars over and above its annual federal obligation level.

- GRAB BAG. We have been able to consistently obtain "grab-bag" obligation authority from other states. We anticipate this will allow us to program approximately $5 million of impounded federal highway funds for each year of the biennium.

- FOREST HIGHWAY FUNDS. Through rigorous justification, the department has captured the maximum amount of Forest Highway Program funding available to Montana for the 1992-93 biennium. This will bring the state $3.5 million for each of the two years and allow the following projects to be constructed.

    - U.S. 93 - Darby - Lost Trail Pass
    - Secondary 419 - Stillwater River Road

- PUBLIC LANDS FUNDS. The department has successfully competed against other states and obtained $4 million in federal funds to be used in the reconstruction of U.S. 212 in the Busby area.

The department will continue to take maximum advantage of special funding opportunities which benefit the highway program.

DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

The department is also cooperating with two communities on the first projects in Montana to ever receive federal line item demonstration project money.

- Bozeman. In response to the community's proposal, the U.S. Congress approved a $4.5 million grant to be used in the construction of the North 19th Avenue Interchange, visitor center and rest area.

- Kalispell. A $150,000 grant was received to conduct a feasibility study for a bypass around Kalispell's congested city center.

STATE-FUNDED CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

Montana's state-funded construction program or Reconstruction Trust Fund gives the department essential resources to meet the basic needs of Montana's highways. While federal-aid is the backbone of the highway funding package, it does not meet all the needs in Montana. Federal-aid also brings with it expensive requirements that are not always necessary by Montana standards. In simple terms, the federal-aid program does not provide sufficient funding or flexibility to address Montana's highway needs.

Without the Reconstruction Trust Fund program, innovative projects initiated by local governments, such as Firehole Avenue in West Yellowstone or the Eureka Main Street project, would not be possible.

Not only do these state funds allow the flexibility of adopting the most cost-effective solutions, they are also critical in filling the gaps left by federal requirements. For example, some types of bridge repairs do not qualify for federal-aid, but are more than can be accomplished by state maintenance forces. This need is now being addressed by devoting a large share of this year's state-funded Highway Preservation Program to contract bridge maintenance.

REST AREAS

The department is addressing the need for more rest areas on Montana's highway system. The Highway Commission has approved a plan to proceed with developing 3 new interstate and 20 new primary system rest areas.

The new primary system rest areas will be built, to the extent possible, under an expanded "rest areas in city parks program." City selection is based, more or less, on highway

spacing between facilities and ease of access for motorists into the community's site. Once workable plans are developed, the department will contribute up to $100,000 for improvements to the facility. Operation and maintenance of the dual purpose city park/rest area will then be undertaken by the community. This innovative program will benefit the travelling public, the state's communities and the department.

THE FEDERAL-AID HIGHWAY PROGRAM

Montana, like other states, is facing uncertainties surrounding reauthorization of the federal highway program. The administration's reauthorization bill, which is currently under debate in the U.S. Congress would have some negative consequences for Montana.

- The federal proposal would restructure Montana's highway system to create a small, well-endowed National Highway System (NHS) and a huge, poorly-funded Urban/Rural System. Only 25 percent of Montana's current federal-aid system would be designated as NHS in the federal proposal. Map 1 displays the federally proposed NHS system which we feel is totally inadequate to meet the needs of the state.

- The federal proposal would also drastically increase the percentage of state money required to match federal highway dollars.

Because of the negative impact of these and other provisions in the federal bill, the department has taken a leadership role in developing an alternative to the administration's reauthorization proposals. Over the last several months, the MDOH, in partnership with South Dakota DOT and in cooperation with other western states, has assisted in drafting a highway reauthorization bill that will preserve the best elements of the current program. This bill was introduced into the U.S. Senate on April 16, 1991 by Senators Baucus, Reid and Burns. If adopted, this bill will:

- Preserve Montana's existing highway systems.

- Maintain the existing rate of state contribution.

- Expand the state's flexibility in managing its program.

- Encourage the development of rural tourism.

- Make the unobligated highway trust fund balances available for highway construction.

While the reauthorization debate continues, the department is actively planning contingencies to insure continuity in the planned 1992-93 highway program, regardless of which bill and funding level is ultimately approved.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Because of the uncertainties that persist, both in regard to federal highway program reauthorization and the wholly state-funded construction program, a well-conceived, flexible plan is essential for the next biennium. As seen in Graphs I and II, the department has a planned program for major construction through the 1992-93 biennium that will result in over 800 miles of major improvements to Montana's Interstate, Primary and Secondary Systems.

The following are a few highlights of these efforts.

INTERSTATE SYSTEM

- Preservation of Montana's 1200-mile Interstate, which was completed in 1987, continues to be a high priority for the department. As shown in Graph III, by the end of the biennium, 92 percent of the original surfacing on the Interstate will be either repaved or restored to first-class condition.

- Because of the excellent construction and maintenance of Montana's Interstate, the department has been able to transfer significant amounts of Interstate funding to the Primary System where substantial unmet needs exist. Federal approval is now pending on the largest Interstate fund transfer ever applied for by the department: $29.6 million. The department's pavement management system predicts that the pavement condition on the Interstate will warrant fund transfers equal to this level through the 1992-93 biennium.

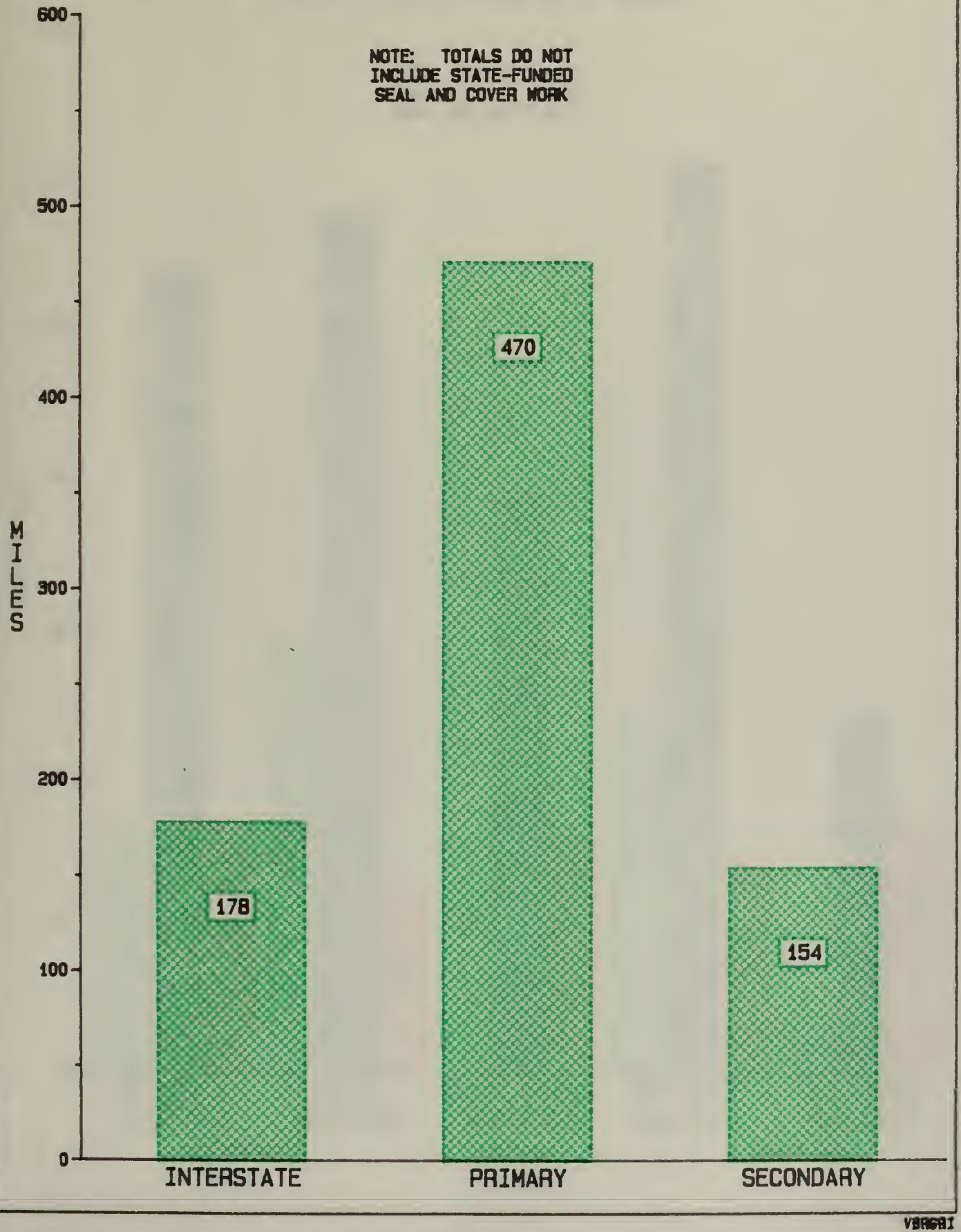
PRIMARY SYSTEM

- 1992-93 will be the first biennium in recent years in which the department expects to contract more miles of reconstruction than repaving on the Primary System. This program shift is attributed to two contributing factors.

    - First, the department is making real progress on meeting the Primary System's pavement needs.

GRAPH I

PLANNED ROADWAY WORK THROUGH THE 1992-'93 BIENNIUM



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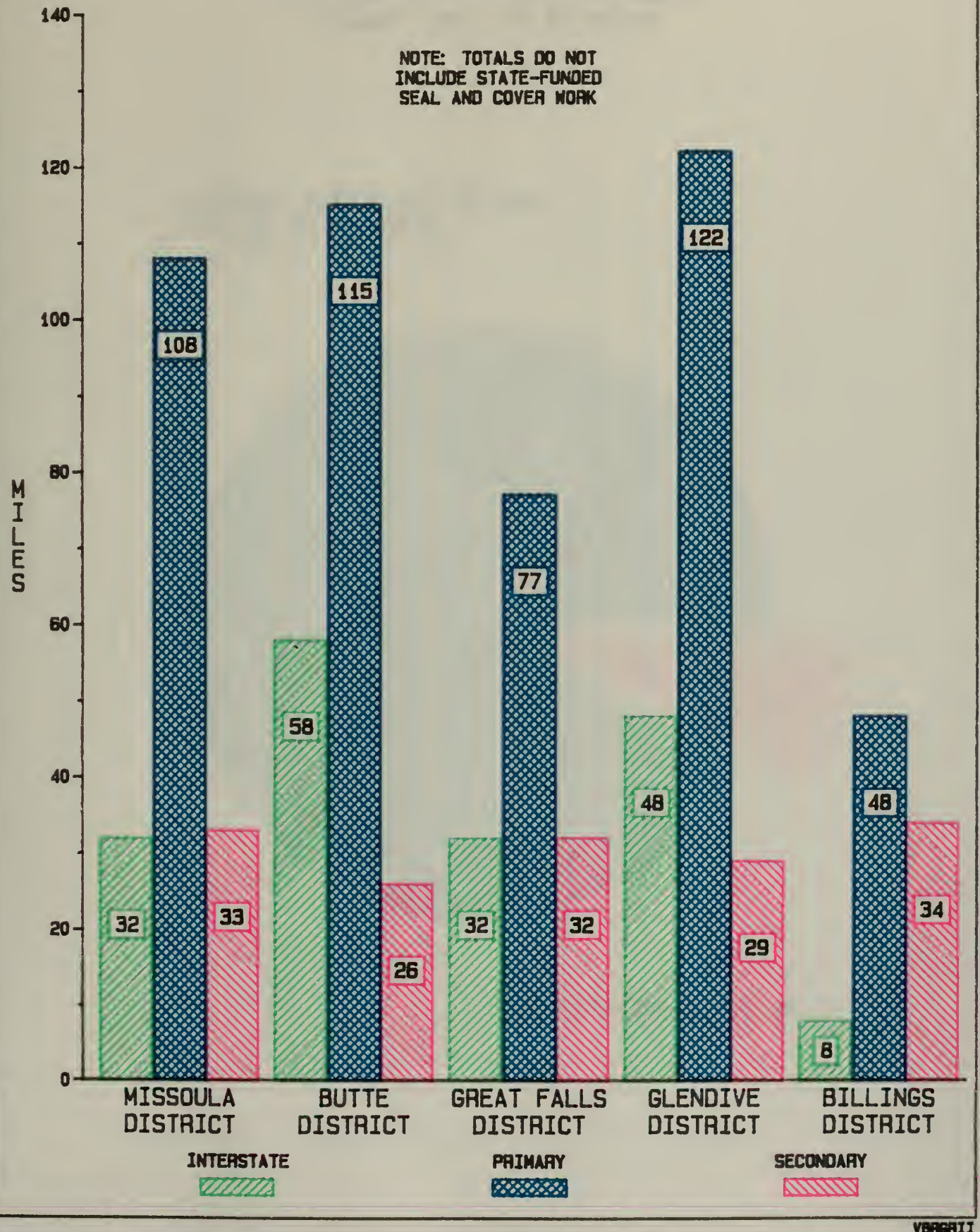
GRAPH II

PLANNED ROADWAY WORK THROUGH THE 1992-'93 BIENNIUM

INTERSTATE, PRIMARY & SECONDARY BY DISTRICT



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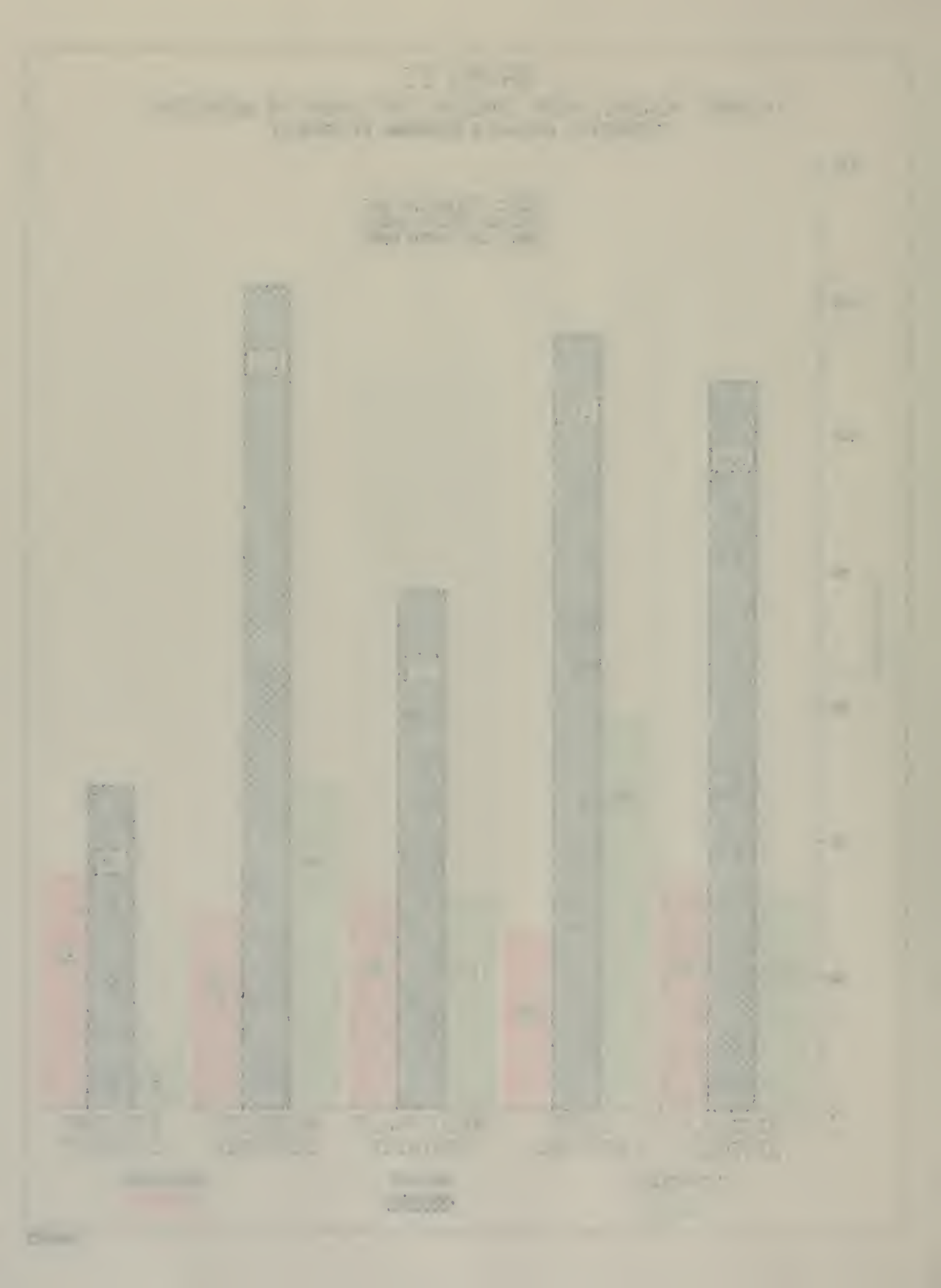
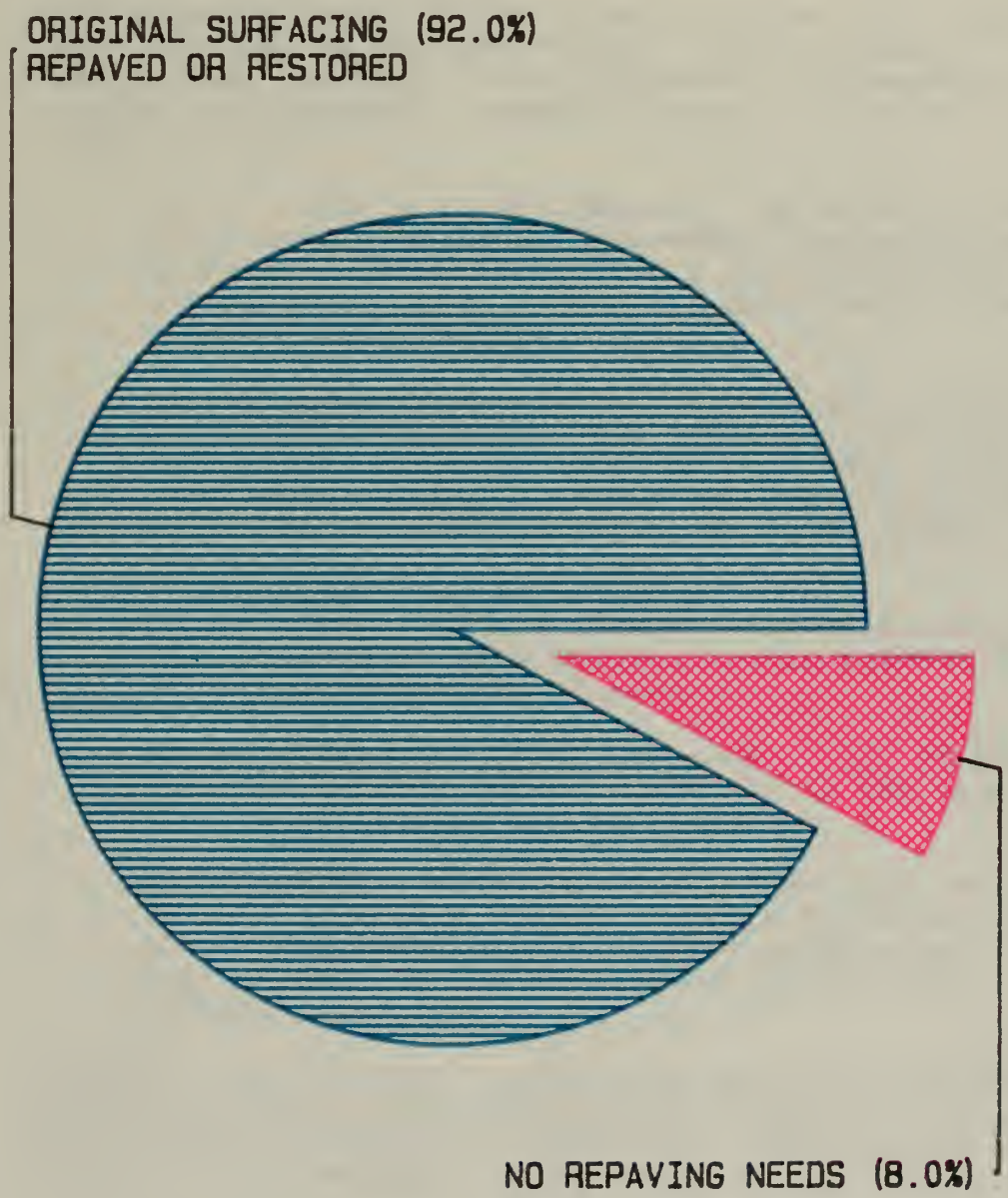


GRAPH III

MONTANA'S INTERSTATE SYSTEM
REPAVED ORIGINAL SURFACING
THROUGH 1992-'93 BIENNIUM



PIEGRIII

- Second, many of the complex reconstruction projects started after the Reconstruction Trust Fund program was authorized in the mid-1980s are coming on line.

- All told, the department is planning to let 470 miles of major improvements on the Primary System over the next biennium exclusive of entirely state-funded seal and cover work. See Graph IV for the types of work in this total.

- "Closing the gaps" on the Primary System is a long-standing goal of the department. We will make significant progress toward upgrading substandard sections of otherwise modern highways during the 1992-93 biennium.

  - MT 13 - Circle to Wolf Point - the majority of this route will be reconstructed during the next biennium. These improvements will bring the entire route up to modern standards except for the Missouri River Bridge.

  - MT 200 - Bonner to Vaughn - except for a short, low-speed section near the junction with I-15, the last construction projects on this major commercial route between Missoula and Great Falls will be let to contract, bringing it up to modern standards.

  - US 87 - Great Falls to Havre - all of the pre-WWII mileage on this critical route between Great Falls and Havre will be rebuilt.

  - US 212 - Crow Agency to Lame Deer - all of the outdated highway between Crow Agency and Lame Deer will be contracted for improvement.

  - US 93 - Whitefish to Canadian Line - the last gap in this otherwise modern highway, which provides a commercial link between western Montana and Canada, will be let to contract during the upcoming biennium.

- Eureka - Main Street - one of the gaps to be upgraded on US 93 between Whitefish and the Canadian Line is the Main Street of the City of Eureka. This project is unique in two respects.

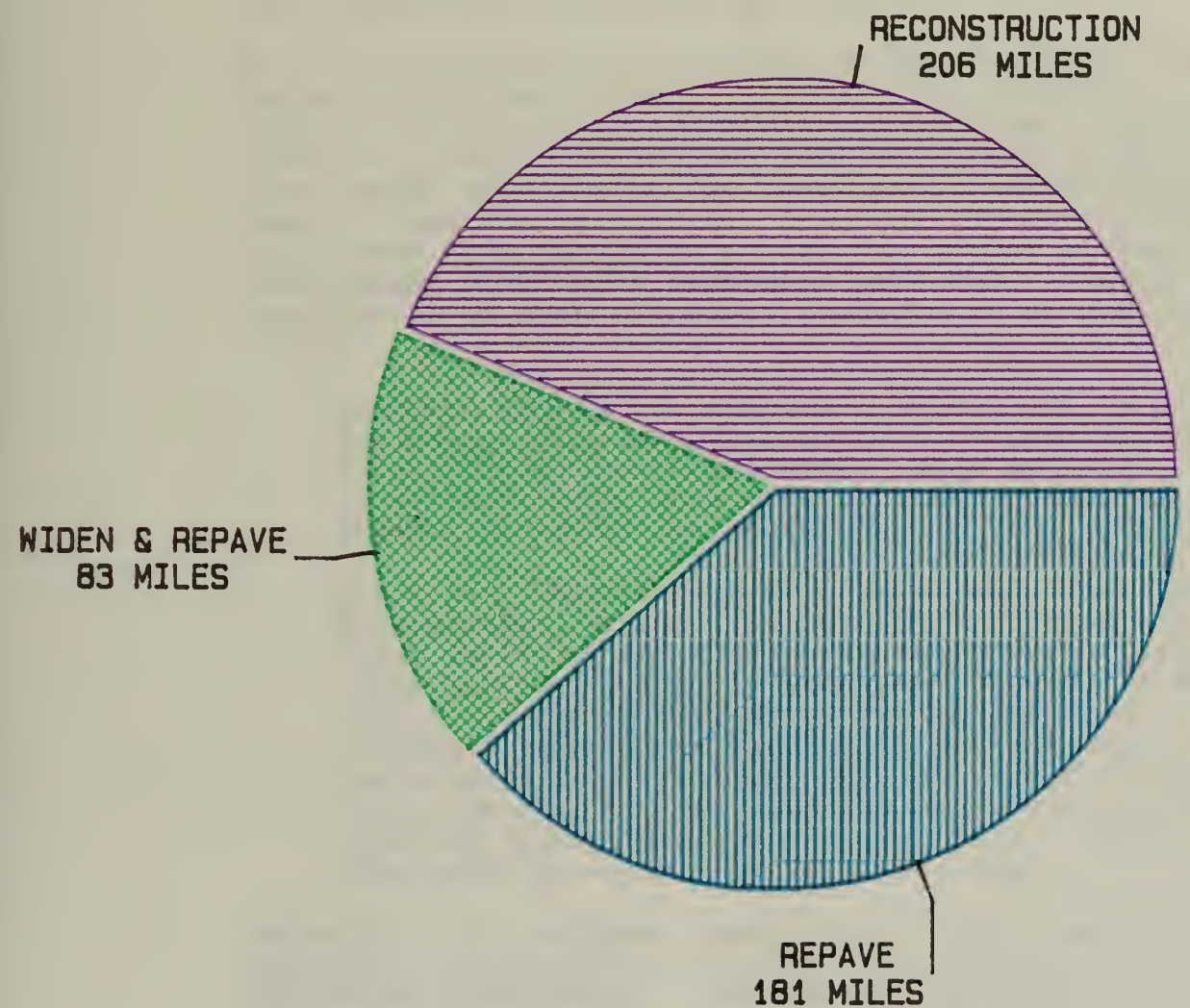
  - It privatizes project development and contract administration. The City of Eureka is acting as the lead agency on this project, having hired a consultant to design, acquire right-of-way, relocate utilities and administer the contract.

GRAPH IV

PLANNED PRIMARY SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS THROUGH THE 1992-'93 BIENNIUM

BY TYPE OF WORK

NOTE: DOES NOT INCLUDE STATE-FUNDED SEAL & COVER WORK



PIEGRIV

- The department is financially sponsoring the city's efforts through the use of wholly state-funded construction program funds. If only federal-aid funds had been available for this work, this type of project would not have been workable.

SECONDARY SYSTEM

- The department has planned an aggressive Secondary System construction program that will spend down the secondary fund balance by the end of the biennium. As shown in Graph V, the Secondary construction program will result in over 150 miles of major improvements to this important system through 1992-93.

- We are encouraging all counties to "quarterback" their Secondary system projects including the planning, design, right-of-way acquisition, and contract administration. This privatization initiative will give local governments more say in the development and outcome of locally important projects. It will also remove the department from controversy over the amount of time and money spent developing secondary projects. County development of some secondary projects is already well along.

    - Flathead County has engaged a consultant to plan and design the secondary project to provide access to the Big Mountain Ski area. This project involves complex questions of cost, standards, and impacts to sensitive areas.

    - The Warren School Curves in Lewis and Clark County. This project, planned to be let to contract in 1993, is being designed by an engineering firm under contract to Lewis and Clark County. The county will also administer the construction contract. When completed, this project will reduce the present high accident rate at this location. The project will also move the secondary road away from the school grounds and improve a situation considered hazardous by local officials.

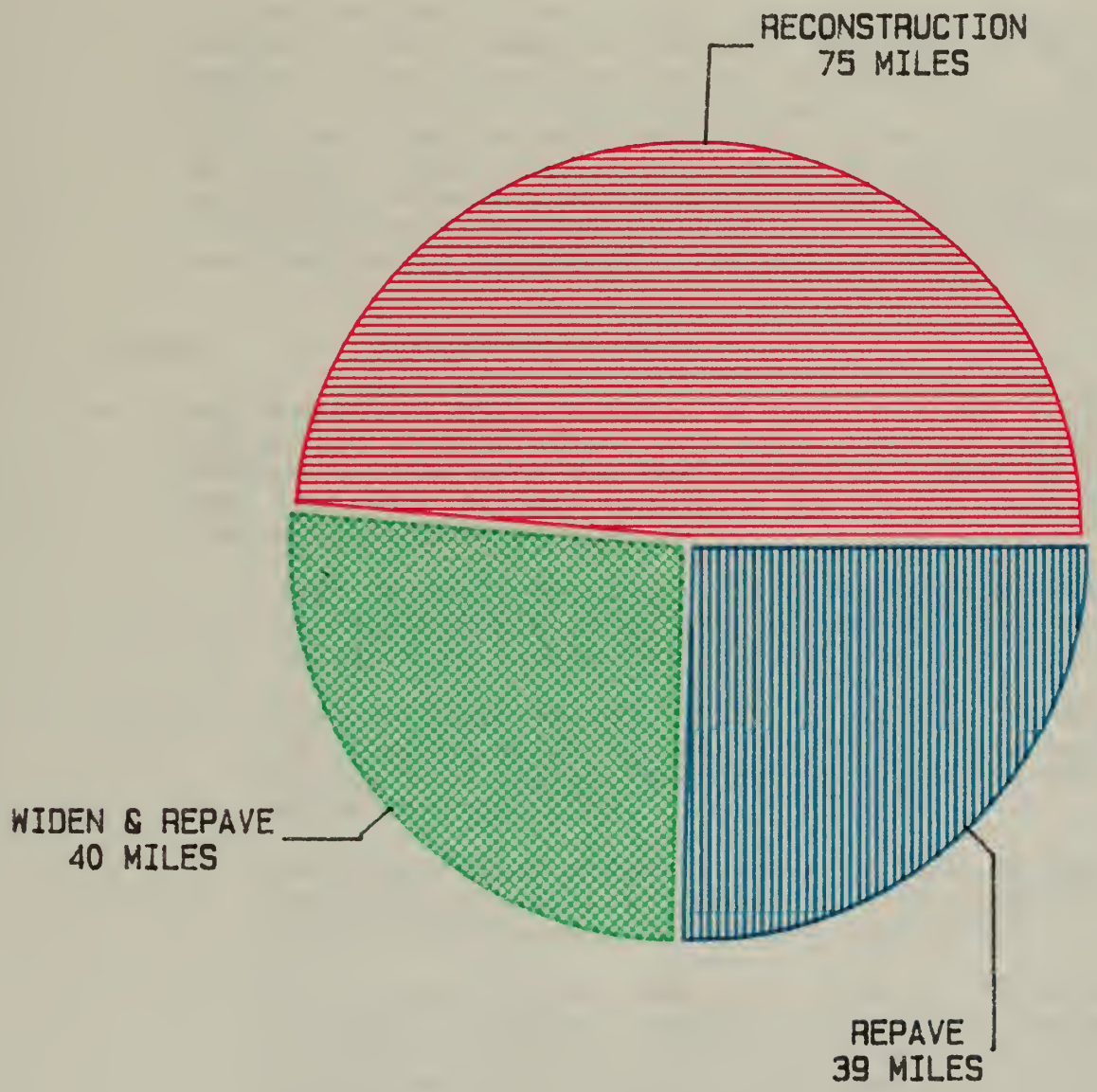
- Secondary 419. Another important secondary project planned for construction during this biennium is the Stillwater River Road. The current road was built during WWII to access strategic mineral deposits in Stillwater County. It is being used to access properties being mined for chromium, platinum and palladium. Forest Highway Project funds, which the state received in addition to regular appropriations, will be used to construct a safer, more efficient road for the transport of ore, mine workers and supplies into the area. This project economically benefits the state through the

GRAPH V

PLANNED SECONDARY SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS THROUGH THE 1992-'93 BIENNIUM

BY TYPE OF WORK

NOTE: DOES NOT INCLUDE
STATE-FUNDED SEAL & COVER
WORK



PIEGRV

capture of additional federal highway dollars and by providing transportation savings to the mine operators and workers.

URBAN SYSTEM

- The department is also actively encouraging all urban areas to take over development and administration of urban system projects. It is hoped that this privatization policy will increase the level of local control on urban projects.

- The Reserve Street four-lane reconstruction project in Missoula easily ranks as the most important urban area project to be undertaken in the next biennium. And, given the critical congestion problems it will mitigate, it may well be the most important project undertaken in the state. When completed, it will provide a direct connection between U.S. 93 and I-90 for through travelling vehicles and an alternate route around the most critically congested intersection in the state.

BRIDGES

- The department will continue to make progress toward addressing reconstruction and rehabilitation needs of Montana bridges over the next biennium. Some of the most important bridges scheduled for reconstruction in the next biennium include:

    - East Bridge - Billings. This obsolete bridge will be replaced with a modern structure and approaches designed to handle the route's traffic volumes.

    - Madison River Bridge - East of Norris. Scheduled for completion in the next biennium, this new bridge will replace the narrowest primary system bridge in the state.

    - Jefferson River Bridge - North of Twin Bridges. The original structure built in 1938 will be replaced with a new bridge and approaches.

    - Milk River Bridge - South of Glasgow. This bridge is currently under contract and will be completed within the biennium. In association with other roadway work to be let in the biennium, it will provide a safer, more efficient route of travel between Fort Peck and Glasgow.

    - Flathead River Bridge - NE of Kalispell. This 55-year-old bridge will be replaced with a modern structure. In association with other roadway

improvements planned to be let in the biennium, the route from Bigfork to Kalispell via Creston will be improved to modern standards.

LOCAL BRIDGES

- During the next biennium, the department will use the maximum allowable bridge replacement funding to address rehabilitation and replacement needs of bridges under local jurisdictions. In most cases, counties would not be able to afford these vital bridge projects if local dollars were the only funding source. In all, the department plans to replace 17 and rehabilitate 2 bridges under local jurisdictions during the next biennium.

- Some significant bridges on the local system that will be contracted in 1992-93 include:

    - Teton River Bridge near Loma
    - Buffalo Rapids Bridge south of Big Arm
    - Beaverhead River near Dillon
    - Musselshell River near Melstone
    - Blackfoot River near Ovando
    - Little Bighorn south of Wyola

INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

The department actively cooperates with other agencies to address issues of importance to Montana.

- Environmental review of major economic developments such as the Bull Mountain Coal Mine.
- Implementation of the federal clean air act of 1990.
- The Shelby Transloading Facility.
- A unified Montana Geographic Information System.
- Projects that encourage tourists to visit the state.
    - Trail of the Great Bear Marias Pass Historic Site and Recreation Complex.
    - Forest Service Scenic Byways Program.

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